

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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R 301840Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8078

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 COTONOU 156

ABIDJAN ALSO FOR DATT

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PFOR, XA, DM

SUBJ: REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINTS STUDY: AFRICA

REF A - STATE 20621, B - CFA NO 3, C - 75 COTONOU A-95,

SUMMARY: PRESENT MESSAGE RESPONDS TO REF A REQUEST FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEPT'S REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINTS STUDY ON AFRICA. EMBASSY DOES NOT CONSIDER RESTRAINTS ON PRB ARMS PROCUREMENT ATTAINABLE THROUGH ANY MECHANISMS USG AND FRIENDLY GOVTS MAY WORK OUT. END SUMMARY

1. TO DAT THE MILITARY GOVT OF THE PRB HAS NOT SEEN FIT TO USE ITS LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO OBTAIN MODERN WEAPONS FOR ITS ARMED FORCES. ON THE BASIS OF THE PAST RECROD, THERE WOULD BE NO REASON TO EXPECT THAT IT WILL TRY TO ACQUIRE MORE ARMS. HOWEVER, THE KEREKOU REGIME CANNOT BE JUDGED SOLELY ON THE BASIS OF PAST EXPERIENCE. IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY MESSIANIC AND AGGRESSIVE, BOTH AT THOME AND ABROAD. THESE CHARACTERISTICS COULD HAVE HAVE IMPLICATIONS RE ITS REQUIREMENTS FOR ARMS IN THE FUTURE. IN OUR OPINION, THE BENIN
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GOVT MIGHT AT SOME POINT DECIDE FOR ONE OF FOLLOWING REASONS

TO SEEK MORE AND BETTER WEAPONS:

A. TO IMPRESS TOGO (IN RESPONSE TO ARMS BUILD-UP IN TOGO AND CONTINUED DETERIORATION IN BENIN/TOGOLESE RELATIONS, WHICH IN PART STEMS FRO THE ACTIVITIES OF BENINESE EXILES IN LOME).

B. TO MAINTAIN OR STRENGTHEN ITS CONTROL OF BENIN'S POPULATION IN RESPONSE TO FURTHER POPULAR INSURRECTIONS, UNREST OR THE LAUNCHING OF A GUERRILLA CAMPAIGN BY THE EXILE OPPOSITION. HERE WE WOULD OBSERVE THAT KEREKOU AND COMPANY APPEAR TO HAVE THE PEOPLE OF BENIN PRETTY WELL SUBJUGATED, AND THERE IS NO PRESENT EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT AGUERRILLA CAMPAIGN IS BEING PLANNED BY OPPOSITIONISTS OR COULD EVER BE STARTED.

C. TO BOOST MORALE AMONG THE TROOPS BY GIVING THEM BETTER WEAPONS.

D. TO ASSIST A COMMUNIST POWER (E.G., THE SOVIET UNION) IN ESTABLISHING A BASE IN BENIN FROM WHICH THAT POWER, WITH BENINESE COOPERATION, COULD SUBVERT NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. AS A PRICE FOR SUCH COOPERATION BENIN WOULD PROBABLY REQUEST, AND THE USSR MIGHT BE WILLING TO EFFECT, AT LEAST SOME MODERNIZATION OF BENIN'S ARMED FORCES ON A CONVENTIONAL BASIS, IN EXCHANGE FOR RIGHTS TO ESTABLISH NAVAL, AIR, COMMUNICATIONS AND OR TRAINING FACILITIES IN BENIN. THE USSR HAS ALREADY ASKED FOR PORT AND AIRCRAFT LANDING RIGHTS. INDICATIONS THUS FAR ARE THAT THE SOVIETS HOPE TO GET ALL THE WANT HERE AT LITTLE COST. IN ORDER TO GAIN RIGHTS AND/OR DECISIVE INFLUENCE WITHIN THE BENINESE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, HOWEVER, THE SOVIETS MIGHT FIND IT NECESSARY TO PROVIDE ITEMS LIKE AK 47 RIFLES AND ONE OR TWO AIRCRAFT FOR INTERNAL AIR TRANSPORT. REPORTS WE GOT OF USSR-BENIN FISHERIES HEGOTIATIONS LAST AUG-SEPT (SEE AMB'S MEMCON WITH SOVIET AMB, 30 DEC 75), IN WHICH USSR APPARENTLY FAILED TO GET A FOOTHOLD IN THE PORT IN RETURN FOR ONE OR TWO TRAWLERS, SUGGEST THAT BENIN MAY NOT YET BE READY FOR THIS KIND OF GAME.

E. TO EQUIP A BENINESE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE TO ANGOLA, OR
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REPLACE OLD EQUIPMENT WITH WHICH THAT FORCE WILL BE OUTFITTED FOR THE ANGOLAN CAMPAIGN (SEE SEPTTEL FOR BENIN'S DECISION YESTERDAY TO SEND "VOLUNTEERS"). BELIEVE SUCH EQUIPMENT WOULD CONSIST MAINLY OF MORE MODERN SMALL ARMS AND COMBAT OR COMBAT SUPPORT VEHICLES. (WE SUSPECT SOVIETS WILL EQUIP BENINESE UPON ARRIVAL IN LUANDA, IF THEY EVER GET THERE, AND THAT THE BENIN GOVT, UPON WITHDRAWAL OF THEIR "VOLUNTEERS" WILL ASK IF THEY CAN BRING BACK THAT EQUIPMENT.)

2. IF THE GPRB SHOULD DECIDE TO OBTAIN MORE WEAPONS IN CONNECTION WITH CONTINGENCIES A, B OR C ABOVE, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT IT WOULD ATTEMPT TO PURCHASE THEM FROM COUNTRIES COOPERATING WITH THE USG IN ARMS CONTROL, DUE TO BENIN'S INABILITY TO PAY. GIFTS OR PURCHASES ON EASILY LONG-TERM CREDIT FROM COMMUNIST OR VERY RADICAL SO-CALLED NON-ALIGNED STATES WOULD BE THE MOST LIKELY MEANS OF ACQUIRING ADDITIONAL ARMS.

3. TO DATE BENIN HAS NOT BEEN ATTRACTED BY SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS, NOR DOES IT HAVE EITHER THE BUDGETARY RESOURCES TO PURCHASE AND MAINTAIN THEM, OR THE TRAINED HUM RESOURCES CAPABLE OF USING AND MAINTAINING THEM (BENINESE EVEN HAVE DIFFICULTY LEARNING TO FLY C-47S AND CLEANING SMALL ARMS). SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS IN HERE WOULD HAVE TO BE MANNED AND MAINTAINED BY FOREIGNERS.
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4. IF UNSOPHISTICATED CONVENTIONAL ARMS, AMMUNITION AND EQUIPMENT WERE OFFERED FREE, BENIN WOULD PROBABLY TAKE THEM UNLESS POLITICAL STRINGS WERE UNACCEPTABLE.

5. DUE TO THE POOR STATE OF US-BENINESE RELATIONS AND THE BENIN LEADERSHIP'S HIGHLY CONFIDENT "ANTI-IMPERIALIST" MARXISM-

LENINISM AND ITS EXTREME SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, USG CAN HAVE LITTLE OR NO INFLUENCE OVER GPRB ACTIONS IN THIS FIELD, NO MATTER WHAT INCENTIVES WE SEEK TO OFFER. BENIN IS NOW A COUNTRY ALIGNED WITH COMMUNISTS AND THE MOST RADICAL DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. SO LONG AS THE PRESENT BENINESE LEADERSHIP IS IN POWER, WE FORESEE NO ROLE FOR THE USG HERE IN THIS FIELD. THE ONLY GOVT CAPABLE OF EXERCISING ANY DETERRANCE AT ALL AGAINST ARMS ACQUISITION HERE WOULD BE THAT OF NIGERIA. THUS FAR HOWEVER THE NIGERIAN GOVT HAS NOT BEEN VERY TOUGH ON THE KEREKOU REGIME, IN SPITE OF ITS DISLIKE FOR THE LATTER.

6. BACKGROUND: WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW HUNDRED RIFLES AND MACHINE GUNS OF SOVIET AND CZECH ORIGIN RECEIVED FROM GUINEA ABOUT 18 MONTHS AGO, AND AN AMERICAN LIGHT AIRCRAFT GIVEN AS AN INDEPENDENCE GIFT IN 1960, FRANCE HAS BEEN BENIN'S SOLE SUPPLIER OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT. THE VALUE OF FRANCE'S MATERIAL ASSISTANCE TO BENIN'S ARMED FORCES HAS AVERAGED
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APPROX \$450,000 PER YEAR IN RECENT YEARS, BUT THE RATE OF SUPPLY FROM THAT SOURCE IS BEING SCALED DOWN PRECIPITOUSLY. THIS YEAR IT MAY BE ZERO. BENIN'S STOCK OF WEAPONS IS MODEST. FOR A COMPLETE INVENTORY OF ITS ARMS AMMUNITION AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT SEE REF C.

7. AS FRANCE PHASES OUT ITS MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO BENIN, THE GPRB IS LIKELY TO TURN TO COMMUNIST COUNTRIES FOR ARMS, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ADVISOR (WE SUSPECT THAT ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE USSR ARE ALREADY BEING WORKED OUT).

8. AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE ARMS PICTURE IS THE PRESENT CHARACTER AND MISSION OF THE BENINESE ARMED FORCES. THEIR STATE OF MILITARY PREPAREDNESS IS POOR. THEY ARE AGENCIES OF POLITICAL REPRESSION RATHER THAN AN EFFECTIVE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. THEIR PRIMARY MISSION SINCE BENIN BECAME A MARXIST-LENINIST STATE HAS BEEN CONTROL OF THE POPULATION. IT IS TOO EARLY TO EVALUATE HOW THE DECISION TO DESPATCH "VOLUNTEERS" TO ANGOLA, ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY (SEE SEPTTEL), WILL AFFECT THE OVERALL CHARACTER AND PURPOSES OF BENIN'S ARMED FORCES. END BACKGROUND.
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